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NEWS with THE BAY CITY TIMES

DREDGING DUMP

Tuesday, May 29, 2001

By Jeff Kart
TIMES WRITER

A Bay County farmer has offered 93 acres of riverfront land in Frankenlust Township as a temporary site for spoils from a Saginaw River dredging project.

But county officials shouldn't get their hopes up, says a planner with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Army Corps has identified three potential sites, each about 400 acres in size, for 20 years worth of spoils from the upper Saginaw River. The proposed dredging area is 13 miles long, from the railroad bridge next to Liberty Bridge in Bay City to the railroad bridge just past the Sixth Street bridge in Saginaw.

Terry A. Long, principal planner for the Army Corps in Detroit, said a 93-acre site might not be enough to handle even the "backlog" of river sediment. Just removing high spots in the river would result in about 700,000 cubic yards of sediment, Long said. The total dredging project would amount to 3.1 million yards of spoils.

"We'll look at it, but I think that pinning their hopes on a little piece of property is not very feasible," he said.

Mark B. Gottleber of Frankenlust Township made the land offer during a boat ride earlier this month that was sponsored by The Upper Saginaw River Alliance.

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The alliance, a group of businesses, says shipping will end on the river in coming years if it isn't dredged. Gottleber agrees. He said his land is located across the river from Cheboyganing Creek, on the west side of the river in Frankenlust Township.

"I've been out here all my life, so I've seen it when they first dredged it back in the early '60s and I've seen it fill in," said Gottleber, 52.

Gottleber, who farms the land now, said he would be willing to let Bay County use it for dredging if he could maintain ownership. Gottleber said he figures he could develop the land or continue to farm it once the dredging is done.

Gottleber said he made the offer to Bay County Extension Director Howard J. Wetters.

Wetters said he planned to contact the Army Corps about the site. Gottleber would have to give the Corps permission to go onto his land and do soil borings and other investigative work. A purchase by the county would be contingent on what the Corps finds, Wetters said, and nothing's been decided yet.

"I think it's wonderful that he's willing to let his site be explored for that purpose," Wetters said of Gottleber. "It gives us some options that we didn't have."

Wetters said the county is still looking for other temporary sites, and thinks it would be best if the Corps had three or four sites to review.

"If we can find a temporary site, then maybe we can do something before there's no point in dredging the river because all the businesses are gone," Wetters said.

Bay County is considering a temporary site so dredging can begin while Bay and Saginaw county officials decide what to do about the three potential long-term sites identified by the Corps. One of the long-term sites is in Frankenlust Township and two are in Saginaw County.

The Corps will pay for the dredging, but local governments need to decide on a site, get permission for the Corps to investigate the land, then acquire a

site before dredging can go forward.

Long said there aren't any exact boundaries for the three, potential long-term sites, because officials just looked for three agricultural properties that were the right size and close to the river. The three sites are identified on a map by three dots.

Plat maps on file at the Bay County Equalization Office show the landowners on the Frankenlust site include Phyllis Oswald, of 6633 S. Euclid Ave., and a few others.

Oswald, 74, said she owns 170 acres of prime farmland, and she doesn't want to see it covered up with dredgings.

"I'm getting older and I'd like to keep my farm," Oswald said. "I have two sons and a daughter and I'd like to hang on to it as long as I can."

But she figures she won't have a choice but to sell her property if the government wants to condemn it for public use. Tax records show Oswald's land has a market value of about \$130,000.

She said the land would be perfect for piling sediment, because it's already surrounded by a dike.

"They'd have no problem, they could just haul their sludge in there," Oswald said. "It's a humongous pit."

As far as the proposed temporary spoils site goes, Long said even if Gottleber's land was found suitable as a temporary site, it would still take just as long to get the site ready for use as it would for a 400-acre, long-term site.

A study would take about a year, and look at soil, environmental, archaeological and flood conditions, Long said.

"I don't think it's a good idea to go with a small piece of property and spend a lot of time and dollars and not be able to place a lot of materials in there," he said. "I'm not saying we won't do it. I'm just saying it just makes it difficult."

Meanwhile, Long says no future meetings have been

scheduled on the dredging project.

He's still waiting for Bay and Saginaw county officials to decide on the three, potential long-term sites, which were first proposed at a meeting on April 30. A joint meeting of the Bay and Saginaw county boards, proposed at that April meeting, has yet to be scheduled.

- Jeff Kart covers Bay County government for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9639.

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